

POPULATION AGEING AND WORK

Guest Editors' Introduction: Ross Guest & Kate Shacklock

This special edition focuses on issues and challenges for ageing populations and their workforces. These challenges arise at three levels: public policy, the organisation and the individual. Each of the articles in this edition is targeted at one of these three levels at least. Some differences in predicted challenges and desired approaches emerge from the articles.

In the European Union, **Walker** identifies five reasons for the rise in interest in 'age management'. He argues that the ageing European workforce, the continuing difficulty older workers have in obtaining employment, even in a situation in which their skills are needed, and public policy initiatives, contribute to the rising need for action. He identifies a role for policy, managers and individuals to take responsibility to improve the overall workforce situation. At the conclusion of his article is a helpful summary and illustration of what he calls 'age management in practice', identifying the respective sides of age management in terms of workers' employability and the work environment created by employers.

At the public policy level, **Kossen** and **Wilkinson** argue that mature aged workers, long overlooked as an employment policy focus, have risen in prominence as countries realise the consequences of their ageing populations. In Australia, however, the authors argue that with a government majority likely to deregulate the labour market, there is the likelihood of increased financial hardship for older workers. Suggesting that public policy rhetoric alone is insufficient to change access to the workforce for older workers, they argue that the current Australian government has politicised the debate, failed to take account of marginalised people, and that the concern for older workers' futures is not a key priority.

Guest and **Shacklock** suggest there may be an optimum age mix of workers for the Australian labour force. An optimum age mix derives from maximising synergies between older and younger workers. They identify the advantages and disadvantages of employing older or younger workers, and suggest that intergenerational synergies may emerge from combining different age groups at work. They point to early, tentative evidence that future population ageing may bring Australia closer to its optimum workforce age mix; but they identify further empirical work that must be done to have more confidence in such a prediction.

At the organisational level, **Patrickson** and **Ranzijn** argue that a 'new management' is required for effective management of the ageing workforce in the 21st century. Combining research about employment options created by global and community pressures, and individuals' retirement decisions, they suggest that changes are needed to improve the labour force participation rates of older workers in Australia. On the one hand are pressures on employers to extend the working lives of older workers and to meet the increasing challenges from changing technology. On the other hand is the competing desire of older workers to choose when they leave the workforce.

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In contrast, and from individual older workers' perspectives, **Shacklock** and **Brunetto** explore individual older employees' perceptions of the factors that affect their retirement intentions. Using four traditional retirement factors (health, financial circumstances, organisational practices and intrinsic work factors), the mixed methodology approach suggests that there were two significant factors affecting older workers' intentions to retire. These were age, and employees' perceptions of autonomy in relation to their retirement decisions. Flexible work practices were also found to positively influence the retention of older workers.

Implications for management and HRM are identified throughout several of the papers, signifying the critical role they play in the effective future management of ageing workforces.

Overall, the articles underline the significance of population ageing in industrialised countries for public policy, organisational management, and individual working/retirement decisions.